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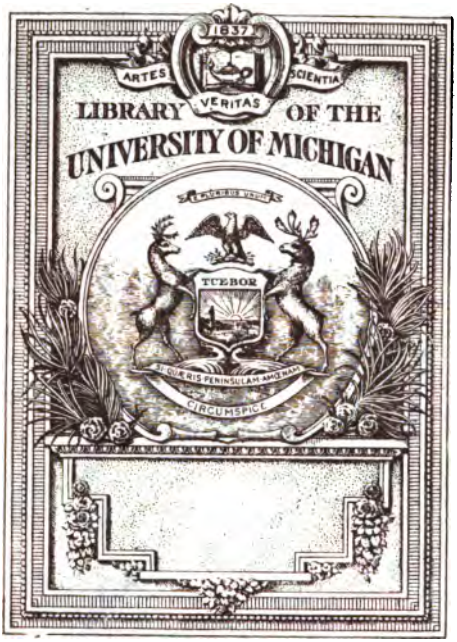
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BRILLIANTS

FROM

BISHOP POTTER



HENRY C. POTTER

Born, 1835 – 1908



RILLIANTS

Selected from the Writings of

HENRY C. POTTER, D.D., LL.D.

By ALICE L. WILLIAMS



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BRILLIANTS

FROM

BISHOP POTTER.

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It is our talent in action, in circulation, not wrapped up in a napkin, that will bless and help the world, and bless and ennoble ourselves; and that rule holds good whether our particular talent happens to be culture or the genius of organization, or the gift of sympathy, or the stewardship of money.

* * *

Christ did not merely preach the Sermon on the Mount and die on the cross. There was no disease so loathsome that He did not put forth His hand and touch it. There was no home that He went into, whether it was the home of that Pharisee whose dirty inhospitality He gently rebuked for giving Him no

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water wherewith to wash His feet, or the home of Simon's wife's mother, which He did not leave until He had expelled the fever which poisoned it and her; — there was no home, I say, which Christ entered, so far as we have any account of His ministry, which He did not leave, both physically and morally, sweeter and decenter and purer because He had entered it. And what He did, to the lame and the blind and the halt and the leper and the impure and the morally vile, I suppose that you and I who profess to be, in one sense or another, His baptized disciples, may wisely be concerned about doing also.

* * *

It was not merely for you and me that Christ died, but for humanity. Into the culture of that elder time He came to put the one ingredient that it needed supremely to ennoble it — the ingredient of a divine unselfishness. He came to make hateful and odious that cultivated self-love which cares nothing for another's welfare. He came to kill out that torpid indifference that could see



wrong and cruelty and injustice, and "care for none of those things," and to supplant it with an inextinguishable and self-forgetting love. And for such a spirit, our later culture, Christian it may be in name, but pagan too often, I fear, in spirit, no less than that other and elder, waits and aches.

* * *

The kingdom of God, whether here or hereafter, must needs be made up of those in whose breasts a sentiment of personal loyalty to a personal Master is sovereign and supreme. If we do not love Christ well enough to part cheerfully with everything else, if need be, so long as we are not parted from Him, then verily we are none of His. And if any of us have lately been disciplined by personal losses, by business disappointments, by straitened means, believe me, it has been because He would fain have us learn to love Him better than gold or silver, and to put His fellowship above the indulgence of our tastes or the gratification of our ambitions. To come to the gate of heaven when

this little life is ended, with a shrivelled soul and a starved heart; to stand there looking back and feeling that we have left behind us in houses and lands, bonds and bank-stock, everything that gave us consideration with our fellows and consequence before the world, this, it seems to me, is as dismal a vision as the imagination could call up. And this is the peril of the longing for, or possession of, wealth.

* * *

Wealth is dangerous, and the worshipper of mammon, whether he dwell in a palace or a hovel, will find it equally hard to find an entrance into the kingdom of God. But wealth, like other dangerous powers, may be subjected to a wise discipline and a resolute control. Lightning is dangerous, but men have mastered it and made it do their bidding. Master your meaner lust for gain and then make it do your bidding in the service of your heavenly Master. It is not how many bonds you have in a bank vault, or how much plate on your sideboard that God looks



to see, but how many lives have been brightened and how many sorrows have been healed by the gifts of your love. The cause of Christ, the cause of truth, the cause of humanity, need your gifts. But none of them need them half so much as you need the blessed and ennobling education of being permitted to give them.

* * *

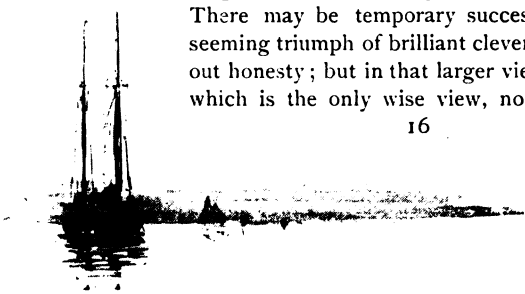
"The times of your ignorance God hath winked at, but now He commandeth all men everywhere to repent!" — ST. PAUL.

This message of the apostle, a personal message to the personal soul, is mine to you to-day. I have no other, This religion of ours, this house, these acts of worship — what do they all mean? Is it a pastime for Sundays, or is it a message and a mandate for Sundays and week-days alike? Will you hearken to it only here, or will you own its authority in the house and in the market-place as well? Is it an adjunct simply of our modern civilization, or is it a personal message to your personal souls? Believe me

there are no other questions in all the world so urgent as these. If the world is to become better, it must become better because we have consented to become better. If vice is to slink away abashed before the reign of a purer and loftier and juster era in politics and in society, it must be because that era has been inaugurated, first of all, in your breast and in mine. And so the question is, whether or no we will begin the work of national, political, social, personal reform right here.

* * *

Give to your calling your best powers. Be a successfnl merchant, and be an honest man. The cheap contemner of uprightness and integrity will say that the two things are incompatible, but the man who has summered and wintered the street will tell you that, in the long run, the two requirements are one. There may be temporary success and the seeming triumph of brilliant cleverness, without honesty; but in that larger view of affairs which is the only wise view, no success is





real or permanent which has not been inspired and controlled by an upright purpose.

* * *

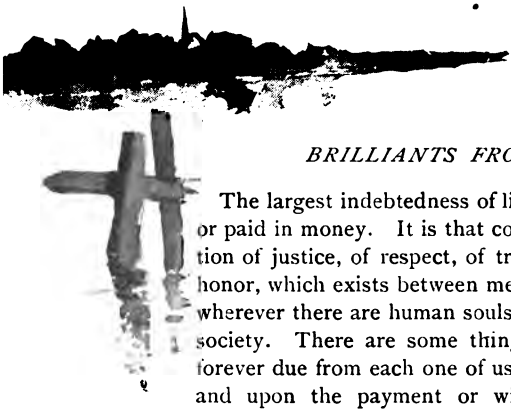
Between a gratitude which sings hymns and a gratitude which does something to life up a fellow-man, there can be no question which is the better.

* * *

Is not that the truest gratitude which strives to widen the horizon of human happiness, and to make our fellows sharers in that which has gladdened us?

* * *

It is not learning, nor eloquence, nor generosity, nor insight, nor the tidal rush of impassioned feeling, which will most effectually turn the dark places in men's hearts to light, but that enkindling and transforming temper which forever sees in humanity, not that which is bad and hateful, but that which is lovable and improvable, which can both discern and effectually speak to that nobler longing of the soul which is the indestructible image of its Maker.



BRILLIANTS FROM

The largest indebtedness of life is not owed or paid in money. It is that complex obligation of justice, of respect, of truthfulness, of honor, which exists between men and women wherever there are human souls and a human society. There are some things which are forever due from each one of us to the other, and upon the payment or withholding of which more depends than upon all the bank vaults in Christendom.

* * *

In our dealings with our fellow-men, which is the better working hypothesis: to assume with David in his haste, that all men are liars, or to prefer to believe that on the whole all men are not liars? Which will best serve to redeem the fallen, and steady the tempted, and inspire the timid? Give your brother-man your confidence. Provoke him to love and to good works by the good which you look to see in him. And you that are fathers and mothers ennoble the child whom you are training by appealing to that which is noble in him. Amid all his faults and wayward-



ness, strive to love him with an unextinguishable hope and trust. Believe me, what your suspicions, your scorn, your lurking distrust of him can never do, your loving confidence will far oftener and far more surely accomplish.

* * *

It was certainly not because to his own vision the religion of the New Testament appealed with such resistless spell that one of the ablest minds in our age has confessed lately, with such pathetic candor, that the enthusiasm of humanity was insufficient for the tasks to which it has set itself; and his testimony at this point is therefore all the more instructive. We may disparage Christianity as we will, but the helpful and humane activities of Christendom are explicable by no other key. It is because, behind all that men are doing, whether in this or any other land, to lift men up, there is, whether consciously or unconsciously, the spell of those mighty truths which are incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ, — the truth of God's fatherhood and of man's redemption; of God's love and

of man's need; of God's judgment and of man's accountability, — that men have suffered, and wrought, and taught, have given of their substance, and have consecrated their lives to make this old world a fairer home for man, to soften and dispel its griefs. Go where you will, ask whom you please, and the answer must needs be the same. The hands that have reached down to snatch the perishing from the jaws of death and give them back to life again have been Christian hands. The feet that have run swiftest and soonest on all helpful and healing errands have been Christian feet. The eyes that have seen the deepest into all our sore and perplexing social problems have been Christian eyes; and the lips that have spoken the most quickening and consoling words, when all other lips were dumb, have been those of Christian men and Christian women.

* * *

Let men dispute about hell, its nature, its torments, its duration, as they will. It is a good working hypothesis that God wants to

get you out of hell and to keep you out of it. Do not let your distrust of Him frustrate His bright design.

* * *

Oh, the wrongs that have been perpetrated in the sacred name of friendship, and under the shield of the sanctity of love! What confidences have been betrayed, what pledges have been broken, what miseries have been entailed upon those whose only fault has been that they have flung down at another's feet the pearl of an utter trust and an all-absorbing affection! Such a trust and such an affection are among the most precious possibilities of youth; and who shall say how often youth has given them both, only to find that they have been casting pearls before swine.

* * *

We may dismiss from our minds any graceful idea of an imaginary home, with only love as its law, and only unselfish and untiring service as its daily rule; we may take the

homes which we know as they actually are, with all their frictions, their dissensions, their often forgetfulness of the law of willing self-sacrifice, and as they may be pinched by narrow means, and clouded by sickness, and darkened often by the shadow of a great grief, is there any other spot so sacred, so helpful, so full of repose and courage and sunshine in all God's world? Go ask the people who, eager for freedom from care, and longing only for indolent self-indulgence, have tried the experiment of living without a home — in hotels, as travellers, as lodgers, as anything else than parents or children, as heads or subordinates in a household of their own, and if they are candid they will tell you not only how much worry and care they have spared themselves, but also, how, in the process of that economy, the best instincts, the tenderest feelings, the truest joys of human life had somehow been quenched in their breasts or vanished out of their horizon. "God setteth the solitary in families," and it is at his own bitterest cost that any soul

among us undertakes to go above His way or to evade or despise His divine order.

* * *

Is there anything more bitterly patent, when we look over the face of our modern life, than that a large part of the misery of human existence comes from the all but wanton recklessness with which one sex flings down the treasure of its love to be too often spurned and trampled upon by the other? And therefore, O young and trusting heart, guard the pearl of your innocence; guard the pearl of your reverence; but most of all, guard the pearl of your affections!

* * *

Let us try to understand how safe our best treasures will be in His keeping, and then let us ask Him to show Himself to every better instinct in us, whether it be of purity, of reverence, or of love. Come forth, O thou Christ of Mary and of Martha, of worldly Matthew and of tempted Peter — come forth out of the cloud and shadow and show us Thy perfect self! Fill us with a divine discern-

ment and discrimination, teach us to abhor that which is evil and to cleave to that which is good. Teach us to prize the pearls of innocence, of reverence, and of love; and that no swinish feet may trample them in the mire, teach us to bring them and lay them early at Thine own.

* * *

It is time that every woman among us, and especially every young girl with culture and influence and social power, should awaken to the needs of her own sex. What Deborah was under the palm-tree at Mount Ephraim every brave and true-hearted woman is called to be in the service of as holy a cause and as precious interests. We call Deborah a prophetess, and so she was. We regard her as somehow separated by her rare natural endowments and her exceptional inspiration, from the other women of her time, and so she was. But in a very real and a very living and lofty sense every woman is a prophetess, with a prophet's gifts and a



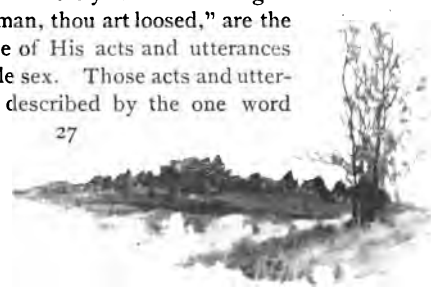
prophet's calling. For what are prophet's gifts but that divine insight, that swift and heaven-born intuition which is your rarest gift, your loftiest endowment? It is our province who are men to reach a consciousness of wrongs to be righted and evils to be remedied by the slower process of reasoning. It is yours to see those wrongs with the most penetrating vision of an often unerring insight, and, not unfrequently, long before men have been awakened to them to burn with a sense of their oppression and their injustice. Do not, then, be afraid to lift your voice in any good cause that aims to elevate women to equal chance and equal respect and equal emolument with men in the great struggle of life. You will be called, many of you, I trust (each one in a separate sphere of domestic happiness and responsibility) to be the "angel in the house." But remember! woman, to be truly the "angel in the house," must resolutely keep and oftimes use, the wings that raise her above the house and all things in it. You are to do

your duty faithfully and lovingly, first of all to those who are nearest to you, but then remember that the woman who in a home thinks only of her own, and lives only for them, will inevitably become a drudge, an idler, or a toy. "No woman can thoroughly order her house, make the wheels of daily life turn without creaking and groaning, adorn her rooms, nay, even design her table, without being a great deal beside a housekeeper, a housemaid, and a cook. It is not by rolling three or a dozen servants into a mistress that a 'lady of the house' can be manufactured. The habits of reason, the habits of mental order, the chastened and refined love of beauty, above all, that dignified kind of loving care which is never intrusive, never fussy, but yet ever present, calm, bright, and sweet, all this does not come without a culture which mere domesticity can never attain." The woman who is to illustrate these must have learned them by that larger vision which sees beyond her own parlor windows, and which makes her hands and her heart to

follow where her eyes have shown her the way.

* * *

It is only by widening the range of our vision, and by coming in contact with sorrows and wants and perplexities other than our own, that we can win the right spirit in which to discharge the duties that lie nearest to us. I turn to that Master whose footsteps, whatever human allegiance may come to be ours, we are supremely called to follow; and nothing is more profoundly characteristic of Him than the breadth of His sympathies for all, and their especial courageousness and explicitness in the interests of woman. He emancipates her, in one instance, from legal thraldom; in another, from hereditary disabilities; in another, from social exile; in another, from masculine contempt. His words to one who came to Him merely for the healing of the body, "Woman, thou art loosed," are the key to every one of His acts and utterances toward the whole sex. Those acts and utterances are best described by the one word



"liberation," and freedom, — freedom from the servitude of a despised inferiority, and the degrading relation of a chattel or a toy is the whole spirit of His gospel.

* * *

Money in itself considered is neither good nor bad. It is an instrument, an agency, a weapon. You may have it without being bad, and you may be without it without being good. But oh! to live for it as an end, to bend all your energies to its acquirement, to fret and scold and repine because you are without it, this, believe me, is the death of all nobleness and the doom of aspiration.

* * *

There must have been some hours in your life when your heart has thrilled with a genuine aspiration, and when, sitting alone in the stillness of your room, you have pored over the page that has told you of the great names that have made humanity immortal, — men and women who have carried its sorrows and its hopes upon their hearts, — who have illumined its low places with the beauty of their



lives, and who, as they moved onward and upward printing their footsteps in blood on the stony steeps, have left behind them the lustre of a nobility that can never pale, and have filled the busy air through which they passed with the fragrance of a heroism that can never die. And at such moments, when all the house has been hushed in its midnight stillness, and you have dropped your book, feeling your nature all aglow with the great thoughts that have been kindled within you, surely, then, you have longed to be like those nobler beings and to follow their radiant footsteps. Cling to that longing, my young brother, cling to it, and follow it as well, for, sooner or later, this love of goodness, this reverence for nobleness, this aspiration after unselfishness, will bring you into the presence of One who is the best, the divinest, the most unselfish of all.

* * *

And yet, how poor He was! I wonder that it has not oftener occurred to us to think how utterly and absolutely Christ triumphed

without the aid of money. Nowadays there is no enterprise however unworldly its aims, that must not rest upon a pecuniary basis. And yet there has lived in the world one Being, who from first to last was absolutely and utterly penniless. Since He came and went away, what colossal fortunes have been heaped up, what imperial wealth has been ravished from conquered peoples and hoarded in the palaces of kings, what mighty combinations of capital have ruled the credit of the civilized world, and made even princes and sovereigns to fawn obsequiously upon their possessors! What has become of them? Who remembers them?

But all the while the sway of that Galilean peasant, who, when He was in the world had not where to lay His head, broadens and deepens and advances. Would you possess the secret of His resistless spell? Verily, if like Simon you come to buy it with mere money, you and your money shall most surely perish together. But if you come discerning that the gifts of God are gifts which money





cannot purchase, then indeed you may hope to learn that secret which transfigures life and death alike, which fills the heart with the sunshine of an immortal hope, and which, thus, shall make you rich forever!

* * *

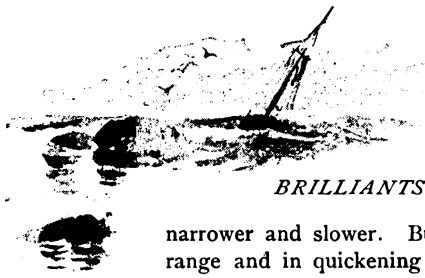
Love is not for sale: and that mysterious sentiment which must be won and deserved, not purchased, never goes along with a jointure, nor can be made over with transfers of real estate.

* * *

Honest work, well done for duty's sake, what is that but another name for what the apostle means when he says, "not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart fearing God."

* * *

Is it to civilization that the world owes its happiness, and are we of to-day, with our higher and finer civilization, happier than our forefathers? They were without a multitude of advantages that we have, and the range and the pace of their lives were almost infinitely



narrower and slower. But in widening the range and in quickening the pace, have we deepened the current and enriched the quality of our lives? "Thou hast multiplied the nation," says the prophet, "and not increased the joy." There may be fulness, amplitude, multiplication, whether of numbers, wealth, luxury, or culture, without a substantial increase of human happiness; and the question for us is, How far have all these things that conspire to make life more diversified and more entertaining, to occupy men less with their own thoughts and more with what is going on about them, to stimulate the imagination and challenge the inquisitiveness — how far have all these things contributed to make living a more joyous, serene, contented, and blessed thing? Candidly, must it not be owned that the old cry of the preacher-king finds its echo in our hearts to-day? "All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it." There is a bewildering multitude of interests and studies and problems that challenges our attention; there is a drain

and pressure upon our sympathies, our power of attention, our capacity to distinguish and estimate, which, sometimes, at any rate, fairly leaves one speechless, and underneath it all, shall we not own it, O my brothers, there is a straining of the eye to see what no culture can disclose to it, and a hearkening of the ear for a tone which no human voice has ever spoken!

* * *

It is a common charge against excessive zeal in religion that it makes a man narrow and one-sided. But did it ever occur to us, that civilization may make a man equally narrow and one-sided? On any other than the atheistic theory of life, man is a spiritual being, meant to live mainly and supremely in a spiritual world. He is going to school here, and the things that he touches and sees and acquires here — his banks and railroads and factories, aye, and his books, his art, his æsthetic adornments and surroundings — all these are simply toys with which he is building block-houses in the nursery, until he is

ripe enough and mature enough for the life and employments of the future.

* * *

What do we need so much as that message and those occasions which shall recall us from the outward and the transient, and lift us to the level of that broader culture which recognizes our relations, not merely to one world but to two? What do we need so much as a wisdom which shall teach us to see and to sing:

"The winds that o'er my ocean run
Reach through all worlds beyond the sun;
Through life and death, through faith, through time,
Grand breaths of God, they sweep sublime.

Eternal trades, they cannot veer,
And blowing teach us how to steer;
And well for him whose joy, whose care,
Is but to keep before them fair.

O thou, God's mariner, heart of mine!
Spread canvas to the airs divine;



Spread sail, and let thy fortune be
Forgotten in thy destiny.

.

A thread of law runs through thy prayer,
Stronger than iron cables are;
And love and longing toward her goal
Are pilots sweet to guide the soul.

So life must be, and soul must sail,
And unseen over seen prevail;
And all God's argosies come to shore,
Let ocean smile or rage or roar.

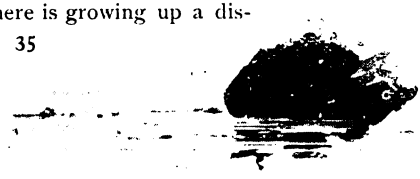
And so mid storm or calm, my bark
With snowy wake still nears her mark:
Cheerily the trades of being flow,
And sweeping down the wind I go."

* * *

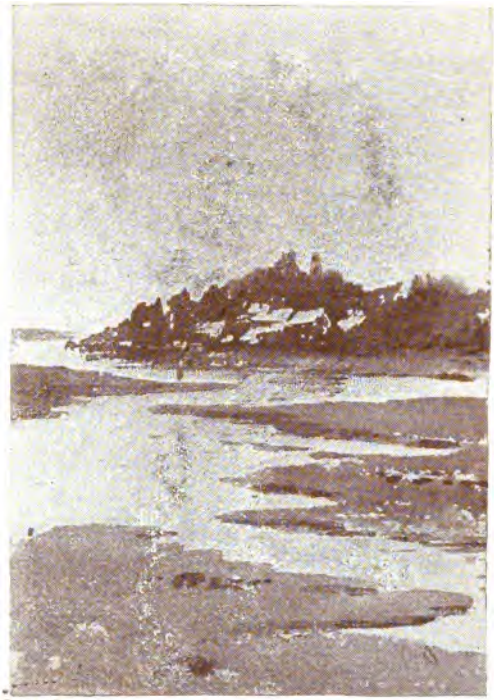
It is nearly an axiom that people will not be better than the books they read.

* * *

More and more there is growing up a dis-



position among parents to permit all matters of religious observance to be with their offspring mere matters of choice or preference. Your child must learn French and German and drawing; but he shall learn his catechism and his Bible lesson and a reverent observance of Sunday, if he chooses, and not otherwise. A more dismal and irrational folly it is not easy to conceive of! I do not say that there may not have been folly in another and opposite direction. I am not unmindful that religious teaching has been sometimes made a dreary and intolerable burden, But surely we can correct one excess (not, I apprehend, very frequent or very harmful) without straightway flying in an opposite and a worse one. And so I plead with you who are parents to train your children in ways of reverent familiarity with God's word, God's house, and God's day. Let them understand that something higher than your taste or preference makes these things sacred and binding and constrains you to imbue them with their spirit. And that you may do this



the more effectually, give them, I entreat you, that mightiest teaching which consists in your own consistent and devout example.

* * *

The truth for us to remember at all times, and especially in these times, is the truth that the hope of a nation is not in its forms of government, nor in the wisdom and equity of its executive, nor in the justice and purity of its administration so much as in the elevation and redemption of individual character among its people. Is it said that we must take men as we find them? — is it urged, in what has expressively been described as the maxim of a prudent despair, that you must adjust the machinery of government and the ordering of life to the inevitable weaknesses and sins of men? — is it urged again, that, in the vast problem of bettering the world, the only immutable factor is man, and that he must be let alone, save as he can be made to produce a new result by being worked into